

## Elgin couple honored as Latino Family Institute Days Foster Parents of the Year

Catalina and Andes Valentin have taken in a number of youth, from days-old infants to teenagers, and have showered them all with the love needed to get through the difficulties of foster care. Their commitment to preserving children's connections with their culture and their family of origin made this family stand out to the Latino Advisory Committee.

In 2005, the Valentins agreed to take four siblings under 8 years old simply to keep them together. This was in addition to their other two children who were under the age of five. The siblings came in needing a lot of things and requiring a lot of time. There were dentist appointments, doctors visits and all the paperwork that goes along with foster parenting. The Valentins kept in contact with the children's caseworker, asked questions about policies, got necessary consents and did the required reporting.

"They did all these things without even a reminder," said Michelle Evans. "As a caseworker, there is nothing more that I could imagine the perfect foster parents

doing! They cared for these kids out of love."

The Valentins expanded their role of foster parents to include the children's birth family. They met with the birth mother in visitation. They modeled effective discipline and taught her about time-outs and other parenting skills. They also cooperated with the foster family who was caring for another baby sibling. They arranged play-dates and made time to "baby-sit" the youngest sister so the five children could maintain contact.

The amount of effort to do this degree of parenting and mentoring was multiplied by the fact that they did it in two languages. The Valentins are Latino, and they provided a Latino, Spanish speaking home to these children of Mexican heritage. They taught the children their colors and alphabet in Spanish and English to help them excel in school. They also maintained the children's Spanish-language skills so they could fluently communicate with their mother as she worked toward reunification.



The children returned home after exactly 12 months in care. Still, the Valentins have remained connected to them and visit frequently. They allowed themselves to become part of the mother's support system. The importance of this support hit home when the Valentins stepped in and cared for the children when their mother had to be hospitalized.

The commitment to culture and the commitment to children, no matter what the permanency goal, made this family a worthy recipient of the Latino Advisory Committee Award.

## Northern region hosts council for birth parents

Just as there is an advisory council for foster parents and a council for adoptive parents, DCFS is listening to parents. The Parent Partners Council has been meeting at Rockford Memorial Hospital since October.

The council is made up of parents, and is supported by the management team and staff from the DCFS Rockford area offices. The group meets once a month to discuss the Department's approach to working with parents, especially as it relates to reunification.

The first objective is to listen to what parents have to say about resources, services and staff support. Ray Gates is the DCFS liaison for this group, representing the DCFS Division of Clinical Services and Professional Development. He will be responsible for compiling the comments and concerns so that the DCFS executive team can make decisions about working more effectively with parents.

"If we take the right approach working directly with parents, it will lead to better outcomes for the family, for the foster parents and ultimately for the children," said Regional Administrator Debbie Palmer-Thomas.

For more information, contact Rebecca Lemont at 815-967-3716.

## Check out Chicago for unique holiday cultural events

The holiday break is a perfect time to explore different cultural activities available just a train or car ride away. For more free and low cost events in Chicago, go to [www.cityofchicago.org](http://www.cityofchicago.org).

### Christkindlmarket

**November 23 -**

**December 24, 2006**

**Daley Plaza, 50 W. Washington (Washington, Clark & Dearborn Streets)**

Experience a traditional German Christmas at Christkindlmarket, inspired by the famous Nuremberg Christmas market dating back to 1545. For the past 11 years on Daley Plaza, this outdoor market has offered exquisite handmade gifts, unique ornaments, rare European fabrics and textiles and the opportunity to devour German delicacies like brats, goulash, potato pancakes, cookies and Gluhwein (a warm spiced wine). Admission is free, with varied pricing for food and merchandise.

Christkindlmarket hours are:

- Mondays - Thursdays  
11 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- Friday - Saturday  
11 a.m. to 9 p.m.
- Sunday  
11 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- December 24  
11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

### Winter Flower and Train Show

**December 9, 2006 -**

**January 7, 2007**

**Lincoln Park Conservatory**

Several model trains, including an old-fashioned steam engine, freight train and trolley, wind their way through a miniature village set in a field of vibrant red, delicate white and soft pink poinsettias. The village, comprised entirely of natural materials including willow, spruce and birch woods, features a variety of Chicago style homes and famous buildings such as the neighborhood bungalow, Chicago Theatre and Chicago Water Tower. Admission is free from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day.

### DuSable Museum of African-American History Coca-Cola Children's Penny Cinema

**740 E. 56th Place, Chicago  
Wednesday, December 27,  
10:30 a.m.**

Showing films *Rugrats-Kwanzaa* and *The Celebration of Kwanzaa: Echoes of Africa*.

**Thursday, December 28,  
10:30 a.m.**

Showing films *Seven Candles for Kwanzaa* and *Santa and Pete*. Reservations are required: (773) 947-0600 ext.225 Admission: \$5.00.

## Winter holiday and weather calls for extra care

Inside and out, the cold weather brings special considerations. Keep children healthy by dressing for the weather. Keep your home fire-free from holiday decorations. Here are some helpful tips.

When the temperature drops below freezing and the wind chill factor is below zero, it is best to stay indoors. But, if you must go outdoors, dress properly for the weather. Follow these suggestions to make yourself more comfortable and protect your body from excessive heat loss:

- Wear several layers of lightweight clothing rather than one or two layers of heavy garments. The air between the layers of clothing acts as insulation to keep you warmer.
- Cover your head. You lose as much as 50 percent of your body heat through your head.
- Wear mittens rather than fingered gloves. The contact of your fingers keeps your hands warmer.
- Wear warm leg coverings and heavy socks or two pairs of lightweight socks.
- Wear waterproof boots or sturdy shoes that give you maximum traction.
- Cover your ears and the lower part of your face. The ears, nose, chin and forehead are most susceptible to frostbite.
- Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect the lungs from directly inhaling extremely cold air.
- Use sunglasses to protect your eyes from winter glare.

Remember these safety tips when selecting a Christmas tree:

- The safest tree is a fresh one. And the freshest tree is one that you buy from a tree farm where you choose and cut down your own tree.
- Ask questions about the tree's freshness, such as when it was cut. Trees exposed to wind and sun for two to three weeks tend to be dangerously dry.
- Bending needles is not always an accurate test for dryness because needles may retain their moisture even though the tree's moisture content is low.
- Make sure the stump of the tree is long enough to provide sufficient support and to soak up enough water. The stump should be 1 inch long for each foot of height to provide enough water for the tree.
- Saw 1/2 inch off the bottom of the trunk to expose new wood that will absorb water easily.
- Check the water level in the stand several times each week and add water as necessary.
- Adding sugar, bicarbonate of soda, honey, vinegar or other ingredients to the water does not help the tree.
- Do not display the tree near heat outlets, or be sure to close off heat vents that would blow directly on the tree.

## Message from your Regional Administrator

With the holiday rush in full swing, I would like to take a moment on behalf of the Northern Region to wish all of our foster and adoptive families, a wonderful holiday season. In the spirit of the season, and all year, you give so much of yourselves by opening your homes to our children.

For some, the holidays are a lonely and isolated time. This can be especially true for children placed in your care. Your patience and nurturing makes a difference. It is what the spirit of giving is all about. We know that you aren't just providing children with shelter, you are giving them love, guidance and hope. The greatest gift we can hope to give is of ourselves. The greatest gift we can hope to receive is to know that we are loved.

Thank you for lighting the way for our children, whether it is for one night, a year or inviting them to be a permanent member of your family. Be safe, be happy, and may 2007 bring your family good health and prosperity. May you get back a lot of that love you so selflessly give.

*Debbie Palmer Thomas*

# Northern Region Training Calendar

## Important Information!

**The DCFS Office of Foster Parent Training is realigning the training offerings in the Northern Region and statewide.**

**To register for December training courses  
or for more information, please call 877-800-3393.**

The DCFS Lending Library is a resource to allow foster and adoptive parents access to a multitude of books, audio cassettes and videos for self-directed training in parenting and family life. The materials span 17 categories. Licensed foster and adoptive parents can borrow materials for a two-week period at no charge. The order form is available in the 3rd Edition of the Lending Library Catalog, which can be viewed on the DCFS web site at [www.state.il.us/dcfs](http://www.state.il.us/dcfs).



**For more information call:  
877-800-3393**

## Get involved with the Northern Region Foster Parent Advisory Council

Foster parents Sharon Dempsey and Robyn Harvey talked with DCFS Licensing Representative Sue Zarlenga (center) at the October meeting of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council held in Rockford.



The regional advisory council meets on the third Tuesday at the DeKalb DCFS Office located at 760 Peace Road. There is a light dinner served at 6 p.m. and the meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. All Northern Region caregivers are invited to attend.

## Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hrs.

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six-hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

### College of DuPage Area 630-942-2903

#### LAKE VILLA

Dec. 9 (Sat)

#### Lake Villa United Methodist Church

9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

#### ROMEOVILLE

Dec. 9 (Sat)

#### Comfort Suites

9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

### Rock Valley College Area 815-921-2010

#### ROCKFORD

Dec. 2 (Sat)

#### Rock Valley Coll.

9 a.m.-4 p.m.

## Northern News

### Regional Reporter

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Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.